



*Bernard C. "Jack" Young  
Mayor*

**COMMISSION FOR  
HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL  
PRESERVATION**

*Tom Liebel, Chairman*

**STAFF REPORT**



*Chris Ryer  
Director*

**October 13, 2020**

**REQUEST:** Concept Review to Construct Five-Story Building Set-back Behind Retained Historic Facades

**ADDRESS:** 733-737 W. Pratt Street & 207 Fremont Street (Ridgely's Delight Historic District)

**PETITIONER(S):** Zahlco Development, LLC

**STAFF:** Caitlin Audette

**RECOMMENDATION:** Disapproval with recommendations to return to the Commission with revised plans

**SITE/HISTORIC DISTRICT**

General Area: The site is located on the northern edge of the Ridgely's Delight historic district. The district is a wedge-shaped residential neighborhood just south of the University of Maryland downtown campus. It is generally bounded by Pratt Street, Russell Street, and Martin Luther King Boulevard. The district provides excellent examples of traditional rowhouse architecture and industrial/manufacturing buildings. Ridgely's Delight has always been a socially and economically mixed-use neighborhood. The district's residential structures represent the first phase of development for Baltimore's rowhouses. The unusual street pattern of Ridgely's Delight produces an intimate human scale and irregular building sites and structures.

Site Conditions: The property consists of 733-737 West Pratt Street and 207 South Fremont Street.

**West Pratt Street** – 733 and 737 W. Pratt Street consists of one vacant lot to the east adjacent to three historic three-story brick buildings with side gable roofs. The properties historically housed commercial space on their ground floors. 733 W. Pratt Street is two bays wide with a storefront featuring a central entry to the ground floor commercial space and a non-historic door to the east to access the upper floors. The six-over-six wood windows have wood sills and lintels. The rear ell is two-stories high with a shed roof and appears to have been largely unaltered. 737 W. Pratt Street is composed of two historic buildings that have been consolidated. The central historic building (previously known as 735 W. Pratt Street) was two bays wide; the ground floor has been combined with 737 to create a large commercial space. 737 W. Pratt Street is three bays wide with a stuccoed first floor that extends to 735 W. Pratt Street. The non-historic storefront at 735 and 737 W. Pratt is slightly protruding from the face of the building

and includes a shingled sloped shed roof and awning. The windows at both buildings are six-over-six wood windows with wood sills and lintels. The rear of the consolidated property has been completely built out so that the two historic rear ell's are no longer recognizable. The building at 737 W. Pratt Street has long been rumored in the neighborhood to have been a stop on the Underground Railroad. CHAP staff has investigated this claim with no definitive results. It is possible that the building was part of the Underground Railroad, however, proof is often elusive as abolitionists and sympathizers kept their involvement quiet to protect escaping enslaved African Americans.

**Fremont Street** – 207 Fremont Street is a three-story three-bay brick building. The first floor has been modified with the use of vinyl siding, two non-historic door openings, and two rows of fixed windows. The siding appears to have been capped with a cornice that has subsequently been removed as there are the remnants of the supporting structure still visible. The upper floors have one-over-one wood windows with wood sills and lintels. The side gable roof at the front of the building features a brick chimney with a bishops cap. The irregularly shaped building narrows to a rear ell at the back of the property.

## **BACKGROUND**

- Limited work has been completed to the buildings in the recent past with only minor alterations in CHAP files dating to pre-2000.

## **PROPOSAL & APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES**

The applicant proposes the removal of the rear of the properties along with most of the roof, leaving 12'-0" of the Pratt Street properties and 3'-0" of the Fremont Street property and the construction of a five-story large scale addition that would infill the properties' boundaries.

CHAP staff applied the following portions of *Chapter 2: Design Guidelines for Additions, New Construction, and Non- Contributing Buildings*.

- *Guideline 2.1 Guiding Principles for New Design:*
  - Avoid demolishing historic buildings, structures, and landscapes when designing new construction projects.
  - Identify the character-defining features of the surrounding historic buildings and streetscape. Design new buildings to visually relate to the historic environment. Respect the established design precedent in the immediate area but do not imitate existing buildings.
  - Contemporary architectural design that reflects its current time, place, use, and culture is accepted, provided that the design is compatible with the character of the historic district.
  - New buildings that are similar to existing historic buildings in materials, form, massing, and architectural features are accepted as long as the new buildings can be distinguished from historic buildings.
- *Guideline 2.2 Site Design:*
  - Retain established property line patterns, street and alley widths, setbacks, primary and secondary building orientation, and landscape elements.
- *Guideline 2.3 Scale and Form:*
  - The scale and form of new buildings must be compatible with the height and depth of surrounding buildings. Where there is variation of building height within the immediate

- neighborhood, the new building should generally relate to the predominant pattern.
- New buildings must complement the massing of surrounding buildings, including the proportion of solid surfaces (walls) to voids (window and door openings.) Respect the characteristic rhythm (fenestration, bays, rooflines, etc.) of existing buildings.
- Design the new building to be proportional to surrounding buildings. Consider important building proportions such as floor-to-floor heights, the size and placement of windows and doors, the scale of articulated elements such as porches, overhanging cornices, and bay windows.
- Floor-to-floor heights in new construction should be within ten percent (10%) of the floor-to-floor heights of adjacent historic buildings.
- Design rooflines to be compatible with those found on surrounding buildings.

### **Application of Guidelines**

- *Guideline 2.1 Guiding Principles for New Design:*
  - The proposed large-scale demolition of much of the existing buildings does not meet the intent of this guideline.
  - The applicants have provided a letter from engineer Peter Malmquist that details that the roof and floors have partially collapsed into the building following moisture intrusion, fire damage, and decay. To make the building occupiable the engineer recommended that the floor and roof be removed along with the south brick bearing wall and most of the east brick bearing wall. Any retained roof framing would need to reinforcement.
  - The human scale of the buildings is a character-defining feature, and the proposed addition overwhelms the scale, specifically at the Fremont Street elevation.
  - The contemporary design of the form of the new addition meets this guideline as it does not attempt to replicate the historic architecture. As the design is further developed, attention should be focused on creating a design that complements the historic architecture with materials, depth and shadow, and pattern of windows and doors.
- *Guideline 2.2 Site Design:*
  - The design maintains the property line and setbacks along the street front, largely with the retention of the historic facades.
- *Guideline 2.3 Scale and Form:*
  - The scale and form of the new construction is generally compatible with the scale of buildings along Pratt Street; however, more information would be useful to better understand the impact of the proposed height along Dover and Fremont Streets.
  - The design uses the historic facades and maintains the historic floor-to-floor height and windows.
  - The roofline does not replicate the shallow side gable; however, the flat roof of the contemporary architecture does not detract from the historic architecture.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENTS**

The proposal has been shared with the Ridgely's Delight ARC, which has met with the development team. No formal response from the ARC has been received to date.

### **ANALYSIS**

The proposal does not meet the guidelines due to the demolition of much of the historic buildings. Staff recognizes however, that any rehabilitation of these structures will require significant reconstruction, which would include the removal of most interior features (because of deterioration), the reconstruction of the roof framing and materials, and the removal of the rear elevation in order to

construct a rear addition.

The most important character-defining feature of the historic district is the human scale of the architecture. The retention of a portion of the historic architecture helps mitigate this concern; however, the retention of a larger portion of the historic buildings would make this strategy more successful. Currently, the applicant proposes a 12-foot setback for the addition, but the historic ridgeline is setback 14 feet on the Pratt Street properties. Staff also believes that a deeper setback for the Fremont Street property would help retain the human scale of Ridgely's Delight. The proposed new construction could be compatible if more of the historic buildings were retained.

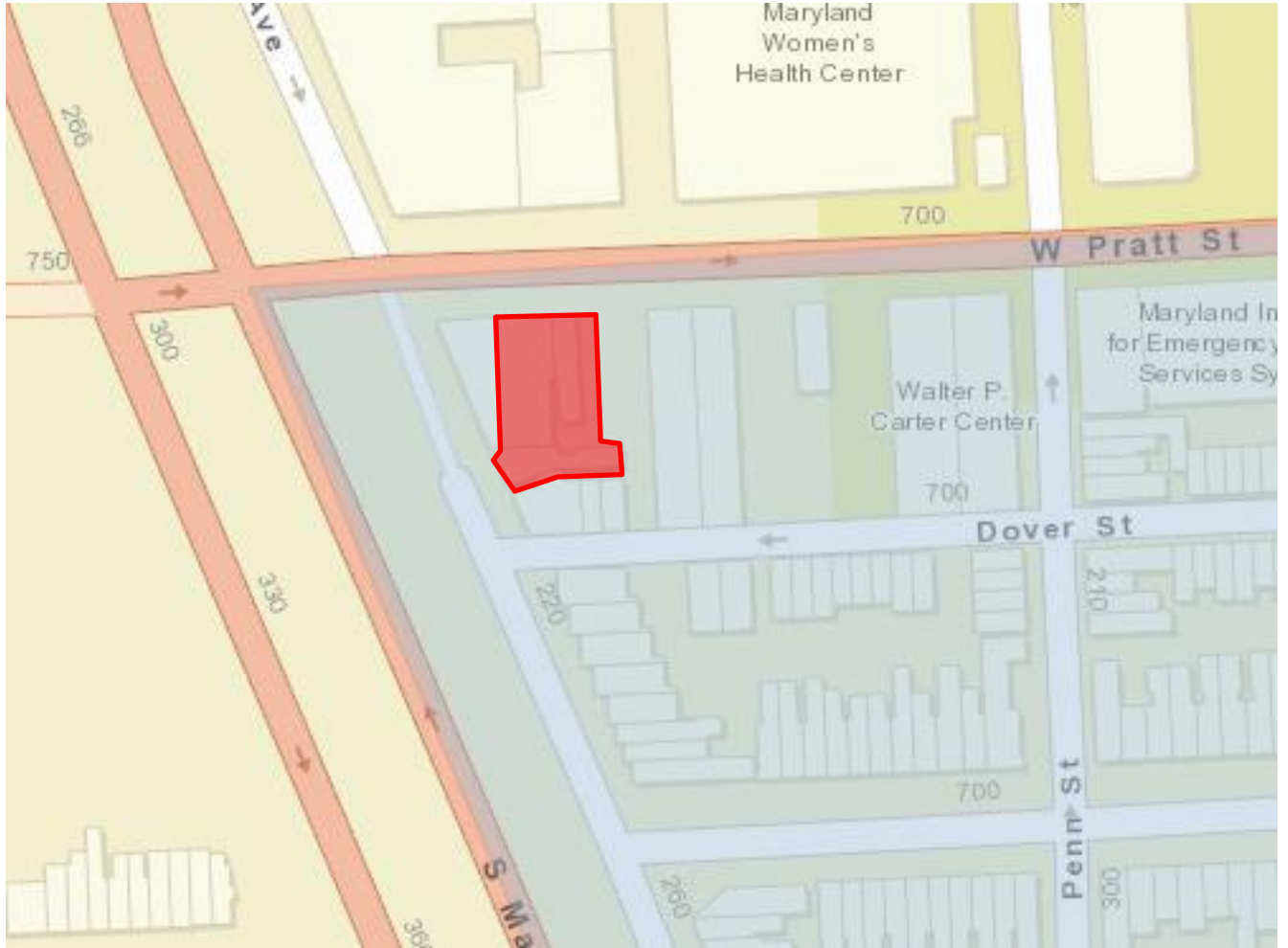
#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**Staff recommends disapproval of the concept with the applicant returning with a proposal to retain the buildings at both West Pratt Street and Fremont from the front façade to the ridgeline.**

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "E. Holcomb", written in a cursive style.

**Eric Holcomb Director**

## MAP AND IMAGES



*Image 1: Location of Site within Ridgely's Delight Historic District*



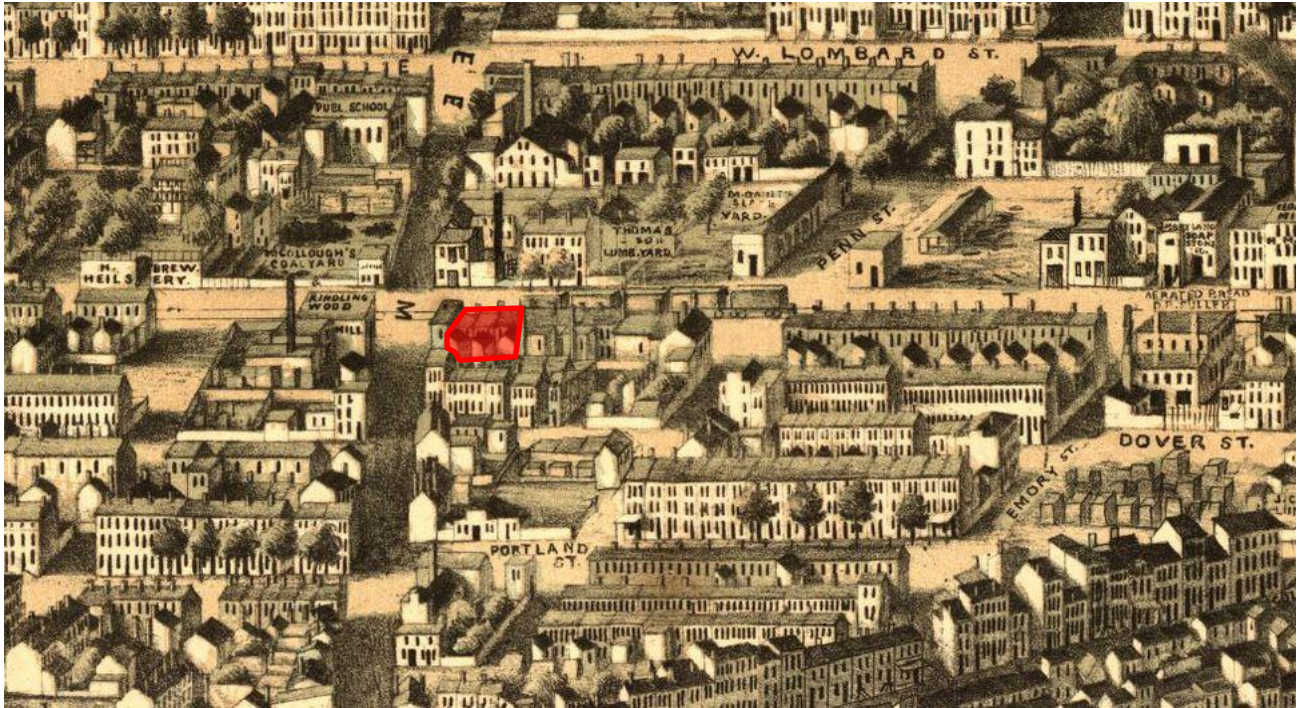


Image 2: Location of properties as seen in E. Sachse, & Co.'s bird's eye view of the city of Baltimore, 1869

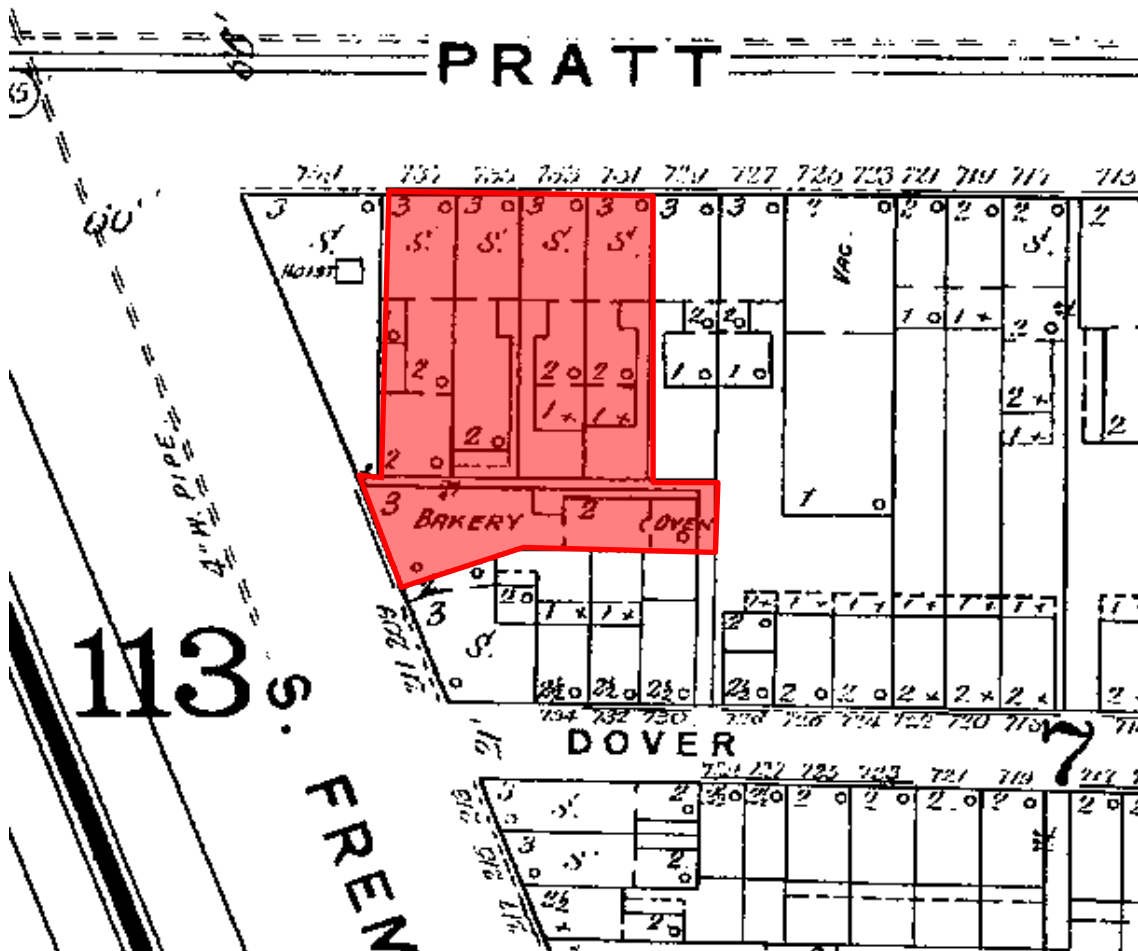


Image 3: 1890 Sanborn Map

733-737 W. Pratt Street & 207 Fremont Street (Ridgely's Delight Historic District) –  
Construct Five-Story Building Beyond Retained Facade

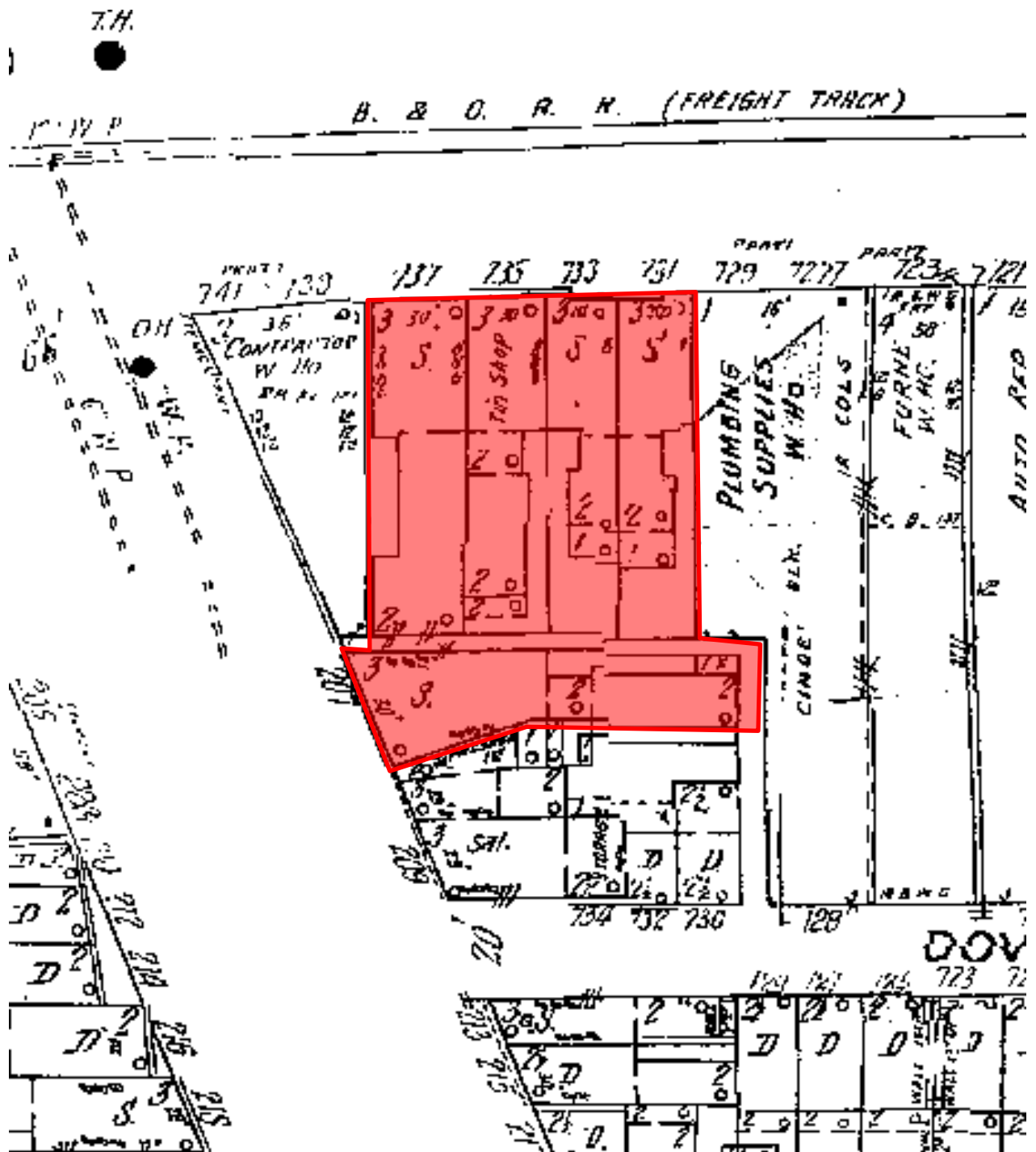


Image 4: 1951 Sanborn Map